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NATION

White House denies flagging

Compromise proposal offered to keep Bermudez, let dissident officers return

By Glenn Garvin
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

MIAMI—Nicaraguan Resistance leader Azucena Ferrey flew to Honduras yesterday with a compromise proposal to try to heal the rift that has shattered the U.S.-backed rebel army and alienated its allies.

Resistance officials here would not disclose exact details, but the plan would apparently maintain military chief Enrique Bermudez in power, while allowing young battlefield commanders who have been trying to depose him to return to their comrades without penalty.

In Honduras, diplomatic sources said Mr. Bermudez spent a second day negotiating with dissident fighters at the Yamales base camp near the Nicaraguan border yesterday. The situation was described as quiet.

The Honduran military was said to be strongly backing Mr. Bermudez with a threat to cut off food to rebels in the camp. The U.S. Embassy, shorn of much of the leverage it had before the House of Representatives rejected further military aid to the resistance Feb. 3, continued to act as broker in the situation.

Although the official U.S. position remained hopeful of a solution, some pessimism was voiced about reviving the insurgency as a combat force. Diplomats said backing Mr. Bermudez was the only possible way of restoring unity.

Nicaraguan rebel officials in Miami said the CIA intervened directly over the weekend when the five-member resistance directorate was considering firing Mr. Bermudez. The CIA threatened to cut off all aid to the rebels if Mr. Bermudez were removed, and a CIA official delivered a long tongue-lashing to rebel officials that infuriated them.

After the CIA intervention, the directorate dropped the proposal to fire Mr. Bermudez and went to work instead on the compromise proposal that Miss Ferrey carried to Honduras yesterday.

But several rebel officials on both sides of the split said they were not optimistic the compromise would work. They said it will have to be approved by Mr. Bermudez, by the dissidents, by Honduran authorities, and by CIA officials in Honduras.

"It's not going to be easy to get any of them to approve it, much less all of them," said one official.

Mr. Bermudez has insisted that the dissidents must be demoted. The dissidents have said they would not return unless Mr. Bermudez is removed. Honduran authorities have expelled several dissident officers, and their permission is necessary before the officers can return to their troops.

call be put on a speaker phone so that all present could hear it, the CIA official launched into what several rebels called "a tirade" that lasted 20 to 30 minutes.

The CIA official called the proposal "imbecilic" and "stupid" and said the U.S. government would abandon all attempts to help the insurgents if it were passed. The CIA official was particularly abusive toward Mr. Chamorro, accusing him of wanting to sell out the rebel movement to Nicaragua's Marxist government.

Mr. Chamorro finally left the room as the stream of insults continued. At the end of the call, another

The CIA threatened to cut off all aid to the rebels if Mr. Bermudez were removed, and a CIA official delivered a long tongue-lashing to rebel officials that infuriated them.

The expulsions were carried out at the request of CIA officials, who have been backing Mr. Bermudez. Over the weekend the CIA took an even more direct hand in rebel affairs after agency officials learned that the insurgency's political directorate was considering a proposal to fire Mr. Bermudez.

Several sources here contributed to the following account, though none would identify the CIA participant:

The proposal was made on Saturday, in writing, by director Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. A pro-Bermudez director, Aristides Sanchez, left the room, ostensibly to make a photocopy of the proposal. Instead, he telephoned a CIA official in Washington to warn him of what was happening.

Moments later, the CIA official phoned the room where the directors were meeting. Asking that the

director, Adolfo Calero, angrily told the CIA official his call was "an indignity . . . we reject it."

When Mr. Chamorro and other directors complained to Mr. Sanchez that he should not have called the CIA, he replied: "They are the ones that put up the money, they are the ones that have chosen us."

Mr. Chamorro tried to press ahead with his proposal after the CIA call, but the other director quickly moved to end the meeting.

Word of the phone call quickly spread through rebel ranks here and most resistance officials were livid when they heard the story.

"I love your country, I love it more than some Americans do," said one rebel official yesterday. "But there are some guys here who think they can buy you and own you. They think you are a puppet." Several Nicaraguans in exile here "had tears

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resolve to support Contras

their eyes, they were so enraged," according to one official.

Mr. Chamorro refused to comment yesterday on the CIA phone call, but several of his friends said he told them he has decided he will not run for re-election to the resistance directorate when new elections are held next month.

The military split, and the CIA phone call, eclipsed most other discussion here yesterday. Most officials had nothing to say about talks between rebel official Roberto Ferrey and Nicaragua's Assistant Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco.

Mr. Tinoco came here to try to work out a time and place for the next round of cease-fire talks between the rebels and Nicaragua's ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front. Late yesterday afternoon there was no word on the progress of the talks, although one resistance official said the insurgents were prepared to soften their opposition to holding truce negotiations again in Managua, the Nicaraguan capital.

The rebels also issued a communique yesterday, denouncing "the most recent attacks by the Marxist-leninist Managua regime against freedom of expression." The communique was prompted by an announcement in Nicaragua that the Sandinistas are restricting news reporting on the military draft.

The Sandinistas practiced a similar, limited censorship of the Nicaraguan news media between 1980 and 1982. From 1982 to 1986, all news had to be reviewed by Sandinista censors before it could be disseminated, and by 1986 all non-government news outlets had been closed down.

Censorship was lifted, and some opposition radio stations and newspapers permitted to reopen last year as part of the Central American regional peace plan. But two weeks ago, Interior Minister Tomas Borge launched an opposition radio station manager in the mouth, then suspended newscasts at the station. Most opposition leaders had been expecting some new type of censorship in the wake of the incident.

William J. Coughlin in Honduras
contributed to this report.

Dole and others deplore loss of hard-line adviser

By John McCaslin
and Gene Grabowski
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The White House denied yesterday any wavering in its support for the Nicaraguan Resistance, which President Reagan's special adviser on Contra-related matters cited as his reason for resigning.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater confirmed that national security aide Jose Sorzano will quit his job by May 31. "He does intend to resign, effective the end of the month, but we don't have a letter or a formal resignation at this point," Mr. Fitzwater said, reacting to a story in yesterday's The Washington Times.

Mr. Sorzano, who helped supervise the administration's efforts to aid the resistance, said he was leaving the senior National Security Council post because of his frustration with the administration's crumbling Contra policy.

Asked why Mr. Sorzano was stepping down, Mr. Fitzwater declined to speculate. But he said administration policy on aiding the anti-Sandinista troops, known as the Contras, remains firm.

"Our main purpose at the moment is to get the humanitarian aid delivered that the Congress authorized a month or so ago ... trying to be as supportive as possible to the [resistance] directorate as they proceed through the peace talks and the cease-fire negotiations," Mr. Fitzwater said.

But Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole said he "confirmed" that Mr. Sorzano was resigning "as a result of differences over American policy in Central America."

"I happen to be sympathetic to the policy concerns that I know trouble Ambassador Jose Sorzano," said Mr. Dole, who added "policy aside — it is deeply regrettable that the administration may soon lose the talents and dedication of this outstanding man."

"His is a voice all of us need to

hear and heed," Mr. Dole said. "I hope that senior administration officials will encourage Ambassador Sorzano to stay on."

Raul Fernandez, an aide to Rep. Jack Kemp, New York Republican, said Mr. Sorzano "was one of the last true believers of the Reagan Doctrine left in the administration. His judgment and intuition was trusted by conservatives."

One congressional source who worked alongside Mr. Sorzano on Contra-related matters agreed that the administration in recent months "has failed to rally behind the resistance."

"Inconsistency is the word," said the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "They've had no backup strategy when we've lost [congressional] votes [on Contra aid]. We've gotten no leadership from the White House."

He said Mr. Sorzano's "policy and procedure is much more aggressive than what the White House wants. A few people are willing to sit back and watch the Contras die. He's not one of them. He's a minority voice over there."

One highly placed Reagan administration official on Sunday said Deputy National Security Adviser John Negroponte had insulted Mr. Sorzano repeatedly in NSC staff meetings, saying his views were too "hard-line." Mr. Negroponte, through a White House spokesman, declined comment.

Sen. John McCain, Arizona Republican, who praised Mr. Sorzano's "outstanding" efforts at the White House and for being a "staunch defender of the resistance," said much of the blame lies with the Democratic leadership in the House, not with the White House.

"Unfortunately," said Mr. McCain, "the administration's options are extremely limited, recognizing the fact that [House Speaker Jim] Wright and his friends will not allow aid to the Contras."

At first, White House planners

sit Soviet monastery

News Bulletin The Baltimore Sun, Page 11A

Wednesday, 18 May 1988
Item No. 4

CIA tells contras not to change army leadership

Knight-Ridder News Service

MIAMI — CIA officials have taken sides in a bruising factional dispute within the Nicaraguan contra movement, fighting to beat back a challenge to the commander of the insurgent army by dissident officers, contra officials say.

Some Nicaraguan leaders were infuriated Saturday when a CIA agent delivered a 20-minute harangue through a remote telephone hookup to a meeting in Miami of the civilian directors of the anti-Sandinista movement, contra officials said.

A director who had proposed the removal of contra military commander Enrique Bermudez was berated by the agent as "stupid" and "an imbecile." The CIA agent drew a rebuke from contra leader Adolfo Calero for his insulting language, contra officials said.

The outburst by the CIA agent, whom contra officials have known for years as "Jorge," was only the latest in weeks of thinly disguised attempts at bribery and intimidation by CIA agents on behalf of Mr. Bermudez, according to dissident officers and other contra officials.

The CIA chose Mr. Bermudez, 56, a former colonel in Nicaragua's national guard, to organize and lead the U.S.-backed anti-Sandinista army in 1981. Since then, the agency has fought back at least two anti-Bermudez campaigns by rival contra leaders.

The CIA also appointed the original members of the contras' civilian directorate and paid their salaries. The civilians' image as CIA puppets impeded efforts to get congressional funding for the contras, however, so U.S. officials have emphasized the directorate's political autonomy and its control over the military.

But now, as the civilians have considered replacing Mr. Bermudez, CIA agents have scoffed at their pretensions to meddle in military affairs.

Rebel dissidents questioned the

legality of the CIA's recent activities. CIA spokesman Sharon Basso declined to discuss the reports yesterday. But David Holliday, spokesman for the Senate Intelligence Committee, said by phone that although the CIA has been barred since Feb. 29 from supplying the contras, "it remains their job to keep in touch."

U.S. officials concede that the CIA's activities have gone beyond mere information-gathering into assertive attempts to influence rebel decisions, but they say this does not appear to be a clear violation of the legal restrictions on the agency.

After the dissident officers began calling for Mr. Bermudez's ouster in mid-April, two of them met with several CIA agents at a Tegucigalpa, Honduras, safe house. One of the agents warned the dissidents that it was "official U.S. policy to support Bermudez," one of the dissidents recalled. He said the agent offered to underwrite expenses of a 60-day vacation for the dissidents if they would call off their anti-Bermudez campaign.

The dissidents refused. Days later, CIA agents attended a meeting of several hundred contra officers and

fighters at the Honduran army's Sixth Battalion headquarters, staged in support of Mr. Bermudez. It was one of several pro-Bermudez meetings CIA agents attended, lending the beleaguered commander what dissident officers said was a persuasive symbol of U.S. support.

Mr. Bermudez stripped the dissident officers of U.S.-funded vehicles and the monthly U.S. stipends previously paid to support their families. CIA agents were aware of Mr. Bermudez's withdrawal of the benefits enjoyed by other rebel officers, but did not interfere, the dissident officers said.

A reliable source who heard explanations from U.S. officials in Honduras for their support of Mr. Bermudez said they had "come down on the side of stability and continuity. Continuity means Enrique Bermudez — and Bermudez means continuity. That's the party line."

Honduran authorities deported seven of the dissidents to Miami May 6. U.S. Embassy officials in Tegucigalpa denied involvement, but the dissidents said Honduran military officers told them while they were being held for deportation that U.S.

officials had requested the expulsions.

The contra directorate reacted to the expulsions by delegating two of its five members to travel to Honduras to determine how broadly anti-Bermudez sentiments had spread through the rebel army. One of the directors, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, told a CIA agent in Honduras that he believed the civilian directorate had the authority to replace Mr. Bermudez, rebel officials said.

The CIA agent jeered: "I admire your idealism, but let's be realistic," a rebel official familiar with the encounter said.

Mr. Chamorro concluded that the opposition to Mr. Bermudez threatened the cohesion of the rebel army, according to a rebel official familiar with Mr. Chamorro's thinking. Back in Miami, however, Mr. Chamorro grew angry at the treatment of the dissident rebels, who had fought inside Nicaragua for several years.

His feelings apparently deepened when a CIA agent called him to complain that the dissidents were being allowed to visit contra headquarters on the north edge of Miami International Airport.

"They kicked you out of Honduras, now they want to kick you out of our offices," Mr. Chamorro reportedly told the dissidents after taking the CIA agent's call.

A CIA agent, referring to the dissidents, told one contra official last week: "These people don't know the kinds of pressures we can bring. We haven't even begun the pressure."

Mr. Chamorro drafted a proposal to remove Mr. Bermudez and install one of the dissidents as army commander. He presented it in a directorate meeting Saturday at contra headquarters. Mr. Bermudez's main ally on the directorate reportedly phoned CIA agent "Jorge," and a speaker phone was set up in the meeting room. Mr. Chamorro's proposal was read aloud to the agent over the phone.

The CIA agent lashed into an angry diatribe against the directors, especially Mr. Chamorro, that lasted 20 minutes. He called Mr. Chamorro "stupid," "an imbecile," and reportedly said that the contras deserved no more U.S. aid.

The directors sat speechless while the agent "just kept blasting away," one rebel official recalled.

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